

A woman with brown hair and bangs, wearing a black top, is sitting at a wooden table on a balcony. She is smiling and holding a white cup. On the table is a tray with a glass pitcher of iced tea and some food. The background shows a large tree with yellowing leaves and a building.

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the home magazine for

you

GARDEN NIGHTMARE

dealing with those
pesky possums

GREAT NIGHT OUT

taste wins in
lebanese sensation

classic chic

living with decades of design



ABOVE: Leather and chrome chairs and the neighbour's reject sofa are clustered around a sturdy wooden coffee table, which was formerly an Indian day bed.

RIGHT: Jan O'Connor enjoys the sunshine that streams into the north-facing inner-city apartment. "That's one of the bonuses of this apartment; the light floods in and it's beautiful and warm."



yesterday's classics still today's chic

These stylish
apartment dwellers
mix an eclectic
choice of
well-loved furniture
and get it right
down to a T

by joanne trzcinski
photography steve tanner

THERE'S an extremely eclectic mix of furniture in the open-plan living area of Jan O'Connor's city apartment.

A wooden Indonesian cabinet sits alongside a classic sofa in Italian linen.

A collection of 1950s vinyl office chairs hangs out with 1920s chrome-and-leather lounge chairs.

And, dotted about, are sublimely modern touches: plastic lampshades by Philippe Starck, a cone-shaped Kettle by Alessi, a glass-and-steel dining table by B&B Italia.

For some reason, it works. Probably because it says a great deal about Jan.

"Everything is just a combination of things I love," she says.

Jan, or, at least, her wares, are well known by Melburnians who drink tea.

With business partner Maryanne Shearer, she operates a business called T2 that sells tea and tea accessories supplying 400 restaurants and food stores in Australia and overseas. They also have two retail outlets: Brunswick St, Fitzroy and at Chadstone Shopping Centre.

The Fitzroy store, which opened four years ago, is known for its gorgeous interior - walls covered in Chinese newspaper ("we didn't have any money at the time and they were in pretty bad condition") and a ceiling painted pink.

It is no surprise that Jan works, and lives, in such stylish surrounds.

She was an architect for 10 years - at Coles Myer, concentrating on in-store development - so she has a natural flair for design and style (her husband, Tone Wheeler, is also an architect and specialises in ecologically sustainable

development). Clever architecture, says Jan, is what originally attracted her to her first-floor apartment, which was designed by noted Melbourne architect Nonda Katsalidis.

"I actually bought it off the plan and anticipated what it was going to look like," she says. "Because I was an architect, it was fairly easy for me to read the plan. I knew Nonda Katsalidis' work and, at that time, he was one of the few architects doing inner-city apartment developments. I had confidence. I knew it was going to be pretty special."

Before moving in, six years ago, she adjusted some of the finishes.

Instead of carpet, she had grey, Sadler concrete tiles put in for flooring ("I wanted the same finish from the front terrace to the back terrace"), chose Koto veneer for cupboards and shelves ("I'd worked with it before and I really liked it") and converted one of the three bedrooms into a walk-in robe.

Her home is "a really livable space", she says, one of the biggest bonuses being the flood of natural light through the front windows.

"The light would absolutely have to be number one," says Jan.

"Late morning on that couch with the newspaper, it's quite yellow and it's beautiful and warm."

Talking about the couch, it has a story, like most of Jan's furniture.

A neighbour had ordered a couch.

When it got delivered, it was the wrong one, so it was temporarily stored in Jan's still-empty apartment.

When Jan arrived, there it was.



"I saw it and said, 'Hang on. It goes with my chairs and I think it looks perfect so I'll buy it.'"

So she did. And it's still in the living area, a relative latecomer to her furniture collection when compared with the other pieces, which she's mostly had for years and years and brought with her from her former Fitzroy home.

There are the two old Indonesian cabinets, one of which is used to store the television and stereo, the other for kitchen items.

There's the French, black, leather-and-chrome lounge chairs designed by Le Corbusier and which are licensed copies of the 1928 originals ("I've always been a bit of a Corbusier fan. I like the simplicity").

There are also pieces recycled from their original context including an Indian daybed that is now a coffee table, and wooden boxes from an engineering office are now used for storing compact discs.

Much beloved by Jan are the seven mustard vinyl-and-aluminium office chairs, perched around the dining table, from the 1958 Aluminium Series by noted American designers Charles and





ABOVE. Sleek ceramic plant holders all in a row hold agapanthus and echo the modern lines of the apartment building.



ABOVE RIGHT. Indonesian tobacco holders sit on top of an Asian cabinet.



LEFT. Black cushions are a great foil to the yellow sofa covering and pick the tones of the vinyl chairs and polished floors.



RIGHT. A sleek bread bin, a Philippe Starck colander and cheese grater with horns, a cast-iron Japanese teapot and an Alessi Kettle show Jan's penchant for collectible kitchenware.

BELOW. Wooden boxes from an engineering office are used for storing compact discs.

BELOW RIGHT. A vase of flower and a Picasso etching find floor space in the living area.

Ray Eames. Jan bought the lot at auction 15 years ago for \$150.

Jan, it is obvious, is a collector.

Pieces by Philippe Starck are one of her particular passions.

Two plastic, moulded chairs by the French designer are on the front terrace. Eight of his lamps cast atmospheric glows at night. She also has two stools doubling as bedside tables, a cheese grater with cow horns, a colander with rocket-shaped base, and a teapot which she never uses "because it's too beautiful".

"I've been a Philippe Starck collector for a long time," she says. "And I've visited his restaurants and hotels overseas."

While Jan loves the city lifestyle - "everything's here" - there is one thing this collector she misses sorely and that is a friend with four legs.

"We do want to have a dog again," she says.

The couple's husky, Miss Max, which used to live with them in the apartment, is now romping happily at Jan's parents' house in Wodonga.

"It's the only thing," she muses, "that will make us move from the city."

